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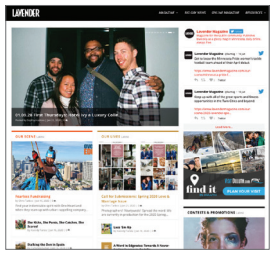

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Photo courtesy of BigStock/rawpixel.com

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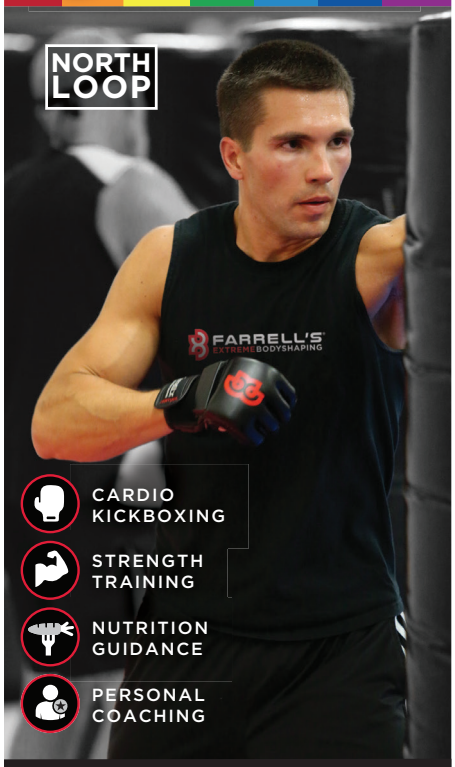

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LAVENDER®

Volume 25, Issue 644 • January 30-February 12, 2020

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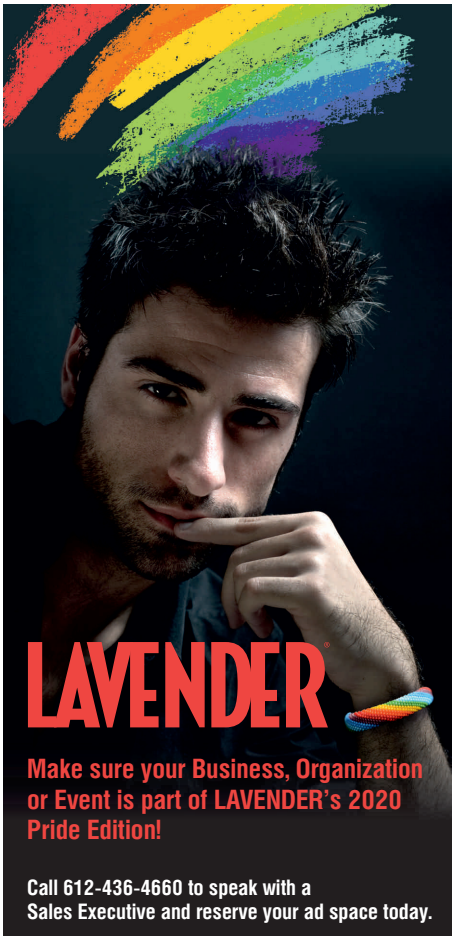

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That's The Power Of Love

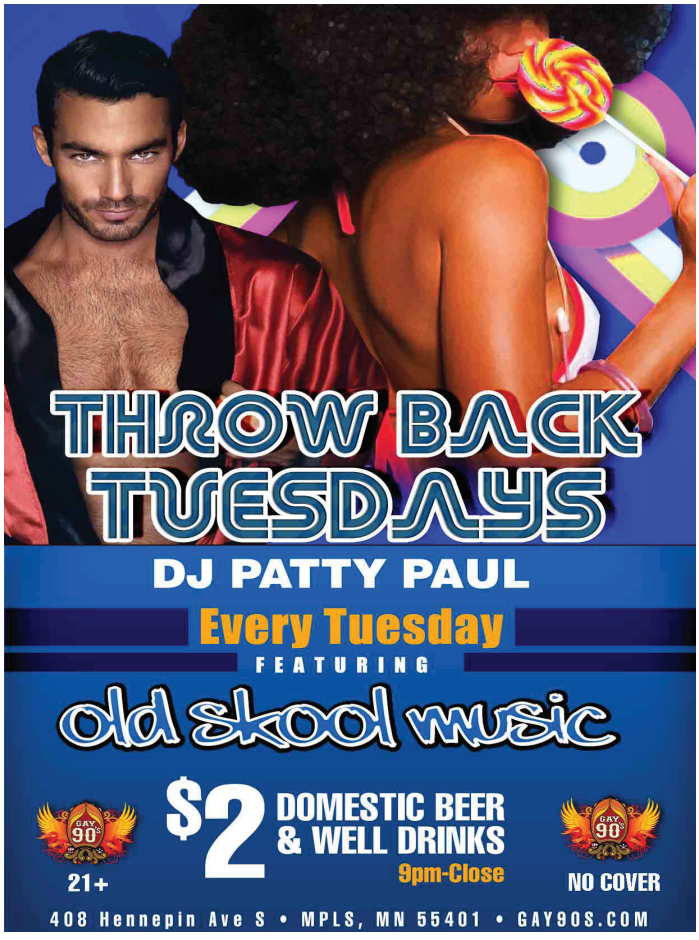
Love is in the air! Can you feel it? Yes, it may be difficult to focus because of all this cold and snow, but love is in the air, and for those of you looking to plan for that perfect romantic evening with your special someone, *Lavender* has you covered!

For our 2020 Romance issue, our friend Joy Summers returns with a round-up of six local restaurants perfect for a romantic dinner. We follow up with a look at three excellent hotels and resorts that make for a perfect getaway without leaving Minnesota, and to top it off, we'll tease your sweet tooth with three Minnesota chocolatiers that'll make your Valentine's gift the best one yet.

On top of that, Bradley Traynor returns with an Eat The Menu highlighting his visit to Tinto Kitchen; Carla Waldemar revisits some more of her magical trip to Spain; and Holly Peterson profiles the supreme succulents of Fractal Cactus in Minneapolis.

Dinner? Check. Luxurious getaways? Check. Chocolate? Oh, that's a big check. A romantic night to remember? You know it, lovebirds!

Speaking of which, submissions are now open for *Lavender's* 2020 Spring Love & Marriage issue! If you've recently had a rainbow wedding in Minnesota, be sure to submit your wedding to be featured in our March 12 issue. Don't delay! ▮



Achieving 2020 Vision(s)

I've mentioned before that we file our articles two issues in advance of publication. So writing today, 1 January, 2020, should be time to re-examine a few of those Resolutions made on 31st December, for auld lang syne.

More Time at The Gym: How many times have you listed that? How long does that intention hold, that it must be renewed annually?

Write that Novel: This can be parsed variously as, "Finish that novel," "Write a short story," "Write something daily." Unless you're already becalmed on the Sargasso Sea of your existing work-in-progress, a nagging voice will murmur, "Write about what?" Your Muse departs.

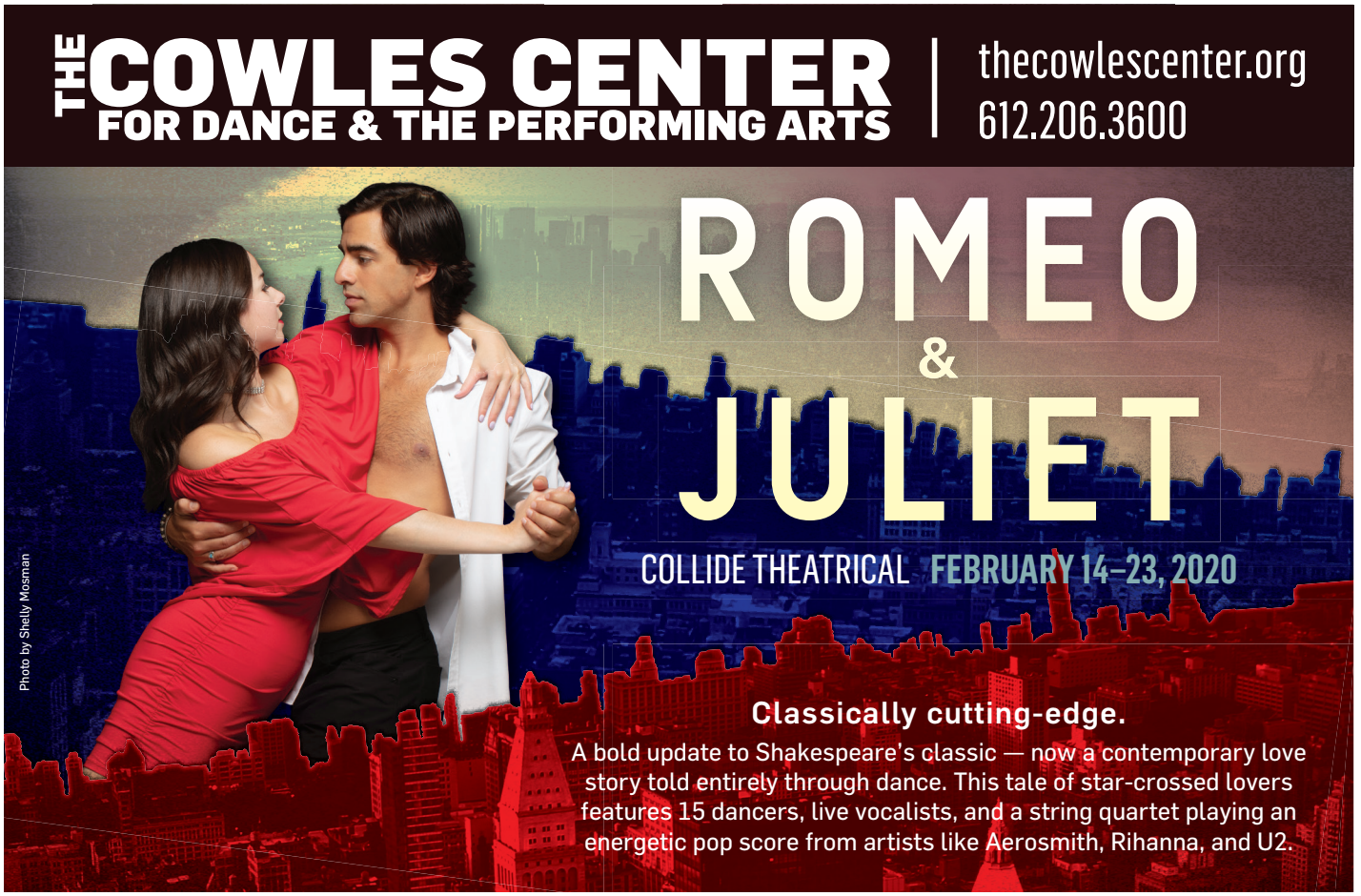
I Will Learn to Play the…: Really? Have you tallied up how many times you've promised this? Where's that ukulele? The piano makes a handsome display stand for photos and tchotchkes, but when did you last sit down on the bench and tinkle through "Für Elise"?

I Will Learn to Play…: Choose a sport that doesn't require the expensive tackle and protective armor of your other attempts; those sticks, bats, racquets to play with that are stacked in the basement, and the nose-guards, shin-guards, mouthpieces to prevent (your) blood being shed. Remember, most sport is combat, and you must wrangle up an opponent or team that is neither less prepared nor psyche-crushingly superior to you/yours.

It's often said that it takes 21 consecutive repetitions to create a habit. Psychologist Jeremy Dean, in *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: Why We Do Things We Do, and How to Make Any Change Stick,* checked it out. In one study at University College, London, 96 participants spent 84 days working on a chosen "new habit." On average, it took 66 days of repetition; fewer for simpler habits, and, extrapolating from the 84 days, up to as many as 254 to gel.

No accumulation of habits will assure your success as a talented lutenist, renown novelist, or Wimbledon finalist, but whatever your goal, you must ingrain the habit of its mechanics; thousands of foul shots, reams of dreadful sentences, miles on the exercise bike.

But first, make a simple, Yes/No decision: The Goal is Worth It; The Goal is Not Worth it. This single, honest answer may simplify or complicate your path through 2020. Happy New Year! ▮



SKELETON CREW

Jan. 30 – March 1
Yellow Tree Theatre, 320 5th Ave. SE, Osseo
Yellowtreetheatre.com

In this timely and oddly familiar tale for many, the play *Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morisseau takes place at the start of the Great Recession. When the fate of one of the last auto plants in Detroit is threatened, four workers are forced to think about how they'll go on if it closes. This play strikes a chord in the American public as each person has to face deeply personal issues involving homelessness, family, future goals and having to choose what is required and what is right.

Skeleton Crew is co-produced with New Dawn Theatre, which illuminates under-represented communities through innovative theatre productions.

Skeleton Crew. Photo by Woodford Sisters

A DOLL'S HOUSE PART II

Through Feb. 23
The Jungle Theater, 2951 Lyndale Ave S.
Minneapolis
Jungletheater.org

In 1879, audiences and theatre scholars alike were left with their jaws on the floor when Nora Helmer leaves her family and husband in Hendrik Ibsen's groundbreaking play *A Doll's House*. The final scene in which Nora closes the door is a sound that has echoed through the modern drama for decades. So this begs the question, what happens when a knock on the same door comes but from the other side? Nora returns many years later, but why and for what?

It's not as often as you think that we get a sequel to a play. However, what we almost rarely get is a well-written sequel, but everything I've heard is that *A Doll's House Part II* gives us just that.

A Dolls House Part II. Photo courtesy of The Jungle Theater

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

Through Feb. 16
Artistry, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Rd.
Bloomington
Artistrymn.org

Artistry continues to gain more and more momentum with their visually stunning and superbly cast shows. As a huge Meryl Streep fan, I'm thrilled that they decided to produce *The Bridges of Madison County*. While I've seen the movie, I have yet to see or hear a musical production of it. The story involves Francesca, an Italian housewife, whose life changes drastically after meeting Robert, a National Geographic photographer. Francesca must then make a difficult decision which includes a once-in-a-lifetime love.

Last year, Artistry produced *Victor/Victoria* which made headlines due to the fact that the last time it was in the Twin Cities was during the original run with Julie Andrews. I can't recall the last time a theatre around the area produced this so it should be on everyone's list to see.

THE DOT

Through Feb. 17
Stages Theatre, 1111 Mainstreet, Hopkins
StagesTheatre.org

"Just make a dot and see where it takes you," is what Vashti's teacher told her when they started working on their art projects in school. Vashti states that she is no artist, and in anger makes a single dot on her paper. Like most teachers do, hers still frames it and hangs it up to to prove a point. This one dot throws Vashti into a journey of self-discovery.

This show is sure to be a delight for families looking to get out of the cold and be entertained.

Continued on page 14

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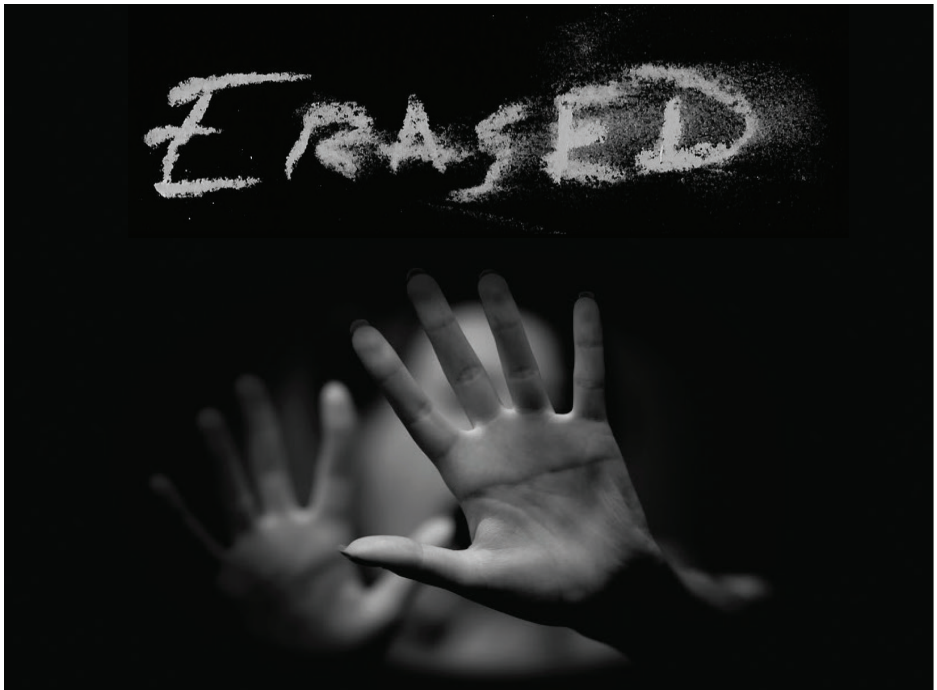

STIGMATA

Featuring new commissions by Jake Runestad and Tim Takach, our spring concert *Erased* will address the communities and environments that are in danger of being erased: from indigenous peoples and trans youth, to natural habitats – as well as our very own lives. The first half of our concert will also feature the local premiere of "Listen," a compelling work for our Chamber Singers ensemble.

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The second half of our concert will address one thing we wish could be erased: the stigma against those who live with HIV. We will premiere a new song cycle called *Stigmata* that addresses through song the effects of this stigma on the lives of people living with HIV every day. The metaphor of the stigmata serves to remind people that we don't need to inflict the horrible pains of social crucifixion upon the HIV+ community.

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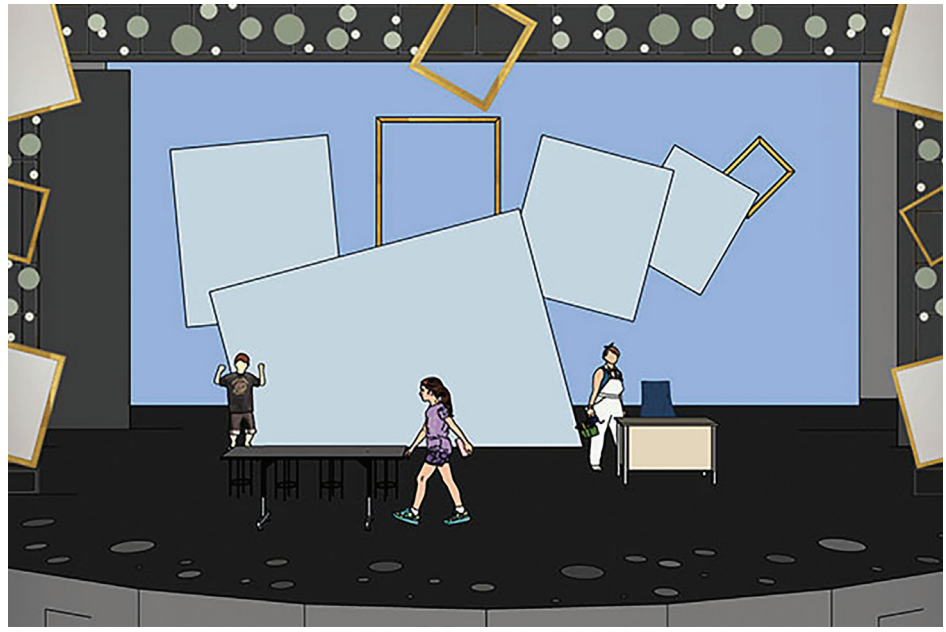
The Bridges of Madison County. Photo by Devon Cox

BOB MARLEY'S THREE LITTLE BIRDS

Through March 1
Children's Theatre Company, 2400 3rd Ave. S. Minneapolis
Childrenstheatre.org

I've heard of a lot of jukebox musicals, however this is the first I've heard that features reggae music. Not just that, but it honors the late Bob Marley, whose music of peace and love is still being played today. *Three Little Birds*, based on the book by Marley's daughter Cedella, is about Ziggy, who instead of focusing on the wonders of life, is too afraid to even leave the house. What happens if a tropical storm hits or evil spirits come out? These are things Ziggy fears until three feathered friends help him learn that "every little thing is gonna be alright."

Bob Marley's *Three Little Birds* is recommended for everyone ages 5 and up. It runs one hour with no intermission. ▮



The Dot. Set design byTiffany Fier

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This inclusive night of performance at the legendary LUSH nightclub shines a spotlight on artists who identify as queer, trans, and people of color. This installment of the 18+ monthly cabaret event will feature amazing artists including Jac Pau, Tank TopOff, Trixi Del Mar, Eun Bee Yes, and Azalia Iman, with the show's tech sponsors in the form of Twin Cities Sirens, a leather club for trans women and trans-feminine individuals. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., show at 7 p.m.

LAVENDER'S FEBRUARY FIRST THURSDAY

Feb. 6
Sneaky Pete's Ultimate Fun Bar
14 N. 5th St., Minneapolis
612-436-4660
Free
www.lavendermagazine.com/lavenders-first-thursdays

Kick back and relax with Lavender at our latest First Thursday happy hour event at Sneaky Pete's in downtown Minneapolis! Presented by Tito's Handmade Vodka, this fantastic social event offers up complimentary light appetizers, samplings of drink specials from Tito's, and a cash bar. Come as you are, enter for a chance to win great prizes, and register for free ahead of time at lavendermedia.eventbrite.com. The event runs from 5:30-8 p.m.

YEAH! BACK 2 THE 90'S & 2000'S DANCE PARTY

Feb. 6
Uptown VFW
2916 Lyndale Ave., Minneapolis
612-823-6233
Free
uptownvfw.org

Relive the hottest dance tracks from the 1990s and 2000s with this free, 21+ dance party at the Uptown VFW. Whether it's R&B, pop, hip-hop, or reggae, you're guaranteed to break a serious sweat all night long. Accompanied by live, high-quality music video mixing, this event will be curated by DJ Manny Duke of the Wintergreen Team, and will feature performances by DJ A-Quil. The event kicks off at 9 p.m.

KARNEVAL TANZPARTY

Feb. 8
Germanic-American Institute
301 Summit Ave., St. Paul
651-222-7027
$15 ($10 for GAI Haus members)
gai-mn.org/karneval

Prepare yourself for the naughtiest night of the year when the Germanic-American Institute of St. Paul hosts Karneval Tanzparty, a night of burlesque, disco, and drag that you're likely to never forget. This fabulous event will feature cabaret performances courtesy of Black Hart Burlesque, including superstar performers Elektra Cute and Victoria DeVille, as well as an amateur drag competition that will benefit JustUs Health, a group that works for equitable health care access for the GLBT community and those living with HIV.

Costumes are not required, but highly encouraged. Libations and a food truck will be provided. The event runs from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.

TCFF AWARDS NIGHT AT CAN CAN WONDERLAND

Feb. 9
Can Can Wonderland
755 Prior Ave. N., Suite 4, St. Paul
$25
twincitiesfilmfest.org

Enjoy the glitz and glamour of the Academy Awards with some good ol' fashioned mini-golf and arcade games! Twin Cities Film Fest and Can Can Wonderland are offering a night to remember with the Oscars being projected on a big screen and the audio piped over the PA system, so you can keep up with the big winners while you're hitting the links.

Each ticket will include a one-hour arcade wristband, so you can play as many arcade games as you want in 60 minutes. All proceeds will benefit TCFF. Amazing food and drinks will also be available for purchase. The event kicks off at 6 p.m. ▮

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EAT THE MENU | BY BRADLEY TRAYNOR | PHOTOS BY MIKE HNIDA

TINTO

Tinto moved? Wait. You mean the place with great margaritas? I thought they were on Lake Street.

They were and they did. Move, that is. Tinto Kitchen was in Uptown, but has found a new home in the Lynnhurst neighborhood of southwest Minneapolis. And if my trip a couple weeks back is any indication, it's likely to become your new spot for margaritas, tacos and a lot more. Right there on the corner of 50th and Penn.

My confidence rests firmly on the knowledge that wife-and-husband team Rebecca Illingworth and Thierry Penichot are at the helm. Rebecca's track record as a successful restaurateur, combined with her passion for Latin cuisine pairs perfectly with Thierry's talents as a truly world-trained chef. This dynamic duo's skills are on full display the moment you walk through the door.

The dining room and bar nestled within are both comfortable and casual. The ideal place for impromptu happy hour with friends or a quiet date night with somebody special. Eventually, you'll even be able to grab tortillas, tacos and a range of prepared foods to go. For now, grab a seat and indulge.

The menu at Tinto reflects a knowledge and respect of traditional Latin cuisine while

Corn Tortillas

Shrimp ceviche

Ropa Vieja

Coconut Flan

completely embracing the adventurous spirit of Chef Thierry.

We began our culinary adventure with a few of Tinto's signature appetizers. Obviously, you can't go wrong with the satisfying crunch of housemade chips dragged through creamy guacamole. Beyond basics, do yourself and everybody at the table a favor and order the ropa vieja. These bite-sized bundles of chipotle braised beef, queso fresco, pickled onion and spicy aioli atop sweet plantains were the odds-on table favorite.

The barbacoa empanada deserves special attention, as well. This piping hot pocket of pulled beef is stuffed inside a crispy pillow of masa, instead of the typical flour-based dough. That's because this dish, as with everything else on the menu, is gluten-free.

If ceviche is your jam, you're in luck. There's an embarrassment of seafood riches at Tinto and the shrimp aguachile was a highlight. The vibrant mix of fresh shrimp, jalapeno, cilantro, cucumber, avocado, red onion and lime light up the crispy plantain chips that accompany it.

Moving onto the main course, we inhaled one of each of Tinto's signature tacos. With reckless abandon. While there are six to choose from, the crispy, unctuous pork carnitas, as well as the spiced, ancho chili-braised beef tacos are simply magical. Each one offers a clever, balanced combination of flavors and textures.

While it's hard to believe there was any room left for dessert after such a thorough meal, there was. And how. Especially upon learning that everything is made in-house. Let's start with the flan. For a full-fledged fan, I'm always skeptical when I see it on a menu. Often it's an underwhelming mouthful of sweet scrambled eggs. Chef Thierry's creamy coconut flan, however, is delicate, yet rich, topped with crunchy granola and pepitas. The chocolate cake is easily another hands-down favorite. This flourless torte is topped with vanilla ice cream and a decadent caramel sauce.

Barbacoa Empanadas

How's that for a culinary journey?

In a world where tacos and margaritas are ubiquitous, Tinto Kitchen and the team behind it offer them up with an uncommon level of passion and skill. In a setting that's approachable. And just around the corner. ▮

Tinto Kitchen
4959 Penn Ave. S.
Minneapolis
612-354-2130
tintokitchen.com

Tacos y Torta

TRAVEL | BY CARLA WALDEMAR | PHOTOS BY CARLA WALDEMAR

Talking Your Way to Spain

"I am exciting to meet you. Please to sit with me," pronounced Sonia in her very best English as we boarded the bus in Madrid. She was one of 24 brave, determined Spaniards who'd signed up for a weeklong program of speaking English 24/7 with 24 Anglo participants. We Anglos had volunteered our time and vocal cords in return for a free week in Spain. Bus, villa bedroom, meals with wine: everything but airfare was provided. But the biggest freebie was far more precious: the opportunity, lacking to most tourists, to get to know—really, really know—individuals in the country they're visiting.

Most of us vacationing abroad can only interact with taxi drivers, waiters, hotel clerks. Here, in the Diverbo program, the conversations quickly make the leap from "Where do you live/What is your job?" to politics, religion, abortion—and those are merely the safer topics. Pablo shared strong feelings about the volatile Catalonian situation; Francesca, the wave of new immigrants; and Maria, about being a professional woman in a man's world. In turn, I mouthed off about the state of American politics and lack of gun control. Happier topics, too—such as Spain's early-on acceptance of gay marriage and, indeed, of no marriage at all in this once-conservative country. Or simply, your favorite films. Or food.

When I first heard about the program, it sounded too good to be true. I kept waiting for the time-share promo, but it never came. The only requirement for a volunteer is to be gregarious—and speak no Spanish. Another bonus: We Anglos came from Britain, Australia, Ireland, Wales, New Zealand, Canada and the Caribbean as well as the U.S., so we also got to make even more international friends. We ranged in age from 20-something to 70-plus—everyone from students on college break to teachers, a policeman and musicians.

The Spaniards were mostly middle-managers in their companies. All were proficient in textbook English—could pound out emails—but terrified of talking. They needed practice in listening and speaking in order to advance in their jobs, which ranged from architect to IT security, from magazine editor to marketing exec. One gent simply wanted to keep up with his kids, who studied English at school.

Anglo and Spanish visitors mingle for a visit to the town of La Alberca.

Another had been passed over for a new job when his interviewer abruptly switched to English. Yet another must attend a meeting in Germany, where English would be the common language.

As the bus bounced through the mountains, a few Spaniards reacted like deer in the headlights to our conversational attempts. They simply nodded their heads and responded, "Yes, I think so," trying like crazy to figure out what the guy with the Welsh accent was saying, or what lingo the lady from Texas employed.

But a glass or two of wine at dinner promoted proficiency. "A-MAZ-ing!" declared Antonio, a 30-something Energizer Bunny, when he learned I was from Minnesota. "Teemberwolves!" he shouted, leaping from his chair with a bucket shot demo and a high-five. And when folks discovered I was from the hometown of Prince, I became an instant celebrity.

Our days began with breakfast at tables of four—two Spaniards, two Anglos. Then, a series of hour-long one-on-one conversations. First, we quickly discussed the verb phrase of the hour (hang on vs. hang out vs. hang in) and an idiom ("I'm all ears;" "the sky's the limit"). Then we were free to talk about anything under the Spanish sun—music, movies, travel, food—as we chose to ramble along mountain paths leading from our forested resort lodgings to La Alberca, a tiny medieval village a mile away, or to cozy up by the fireplace.

Once a day, two-on-twos were scheduled. Suggested topics—always controversial—included "English should be the universal language" and "Families should not have more than one child."

After lunch, a siesta—the only free time of the day. I'd walk into La Alberca to marvel at its half-timbered houses, their stone lintels carved with dates from the 1700s. During one such exploration, I found myself locked in the church (Long story. Which made me the topic of a trivia game that evening.) Others would snooze or hit the internet.

At five, we reassembled for a group activity. Divided into eights, we worked together to complete a creative (and competitive) assignment to present to the others, such as arriving at three questions to ask God; formulating a marketing campaign for an ice cream company; or with only a blanket as prop, introduce a "new product" with a 30-second "video." Another day, it was a game of Truth or Lie (turns out, I am a champ at the latter.) Yet another: Talk about the biggest risk you've ever taken.

More one-on-ones until theater time at eight, when, after an hour of rehearsal, groups would present hilarious skits, which the program director had lifted from Monty Python or *Saturday* Night Live, complete with outrageous costumes from the prop box. Games followed, too. Ever play Competitive Simon Says? Or another called All Those Who… , which is like musical chairs on steroids. When the leader throws out a category—such as "are left-handed," one scrambles for a vacant chair. Broken limbs are rumored to have resulted.

Finally, dinner at nine—early for Spaniards, not so for us Anglos: always a choice of two appetizers and two entrees plus dessert. Then optional bar time and/or a dance party or show, such as the night each country's group was asked to sing a national song. We lame Americans chose "You are my Sunshine." The Caribbeans won with "Day-O." (Duh.)

As the week wore on, the Spaniards loosened up. A young lady who, on Day Two, was ready to pack it up, by Day Five was jestingly taunting a fellow Spaniard to "Shut up your mouth!"

The language challenges became more complex when telephone conversations were added to the mix in order to negate the clues of body language. First, a one-on-one from adjoining rooms (My assignment: to try to hire a babysitter); later, a conference call involving one Anglo and three Spaniards. The "real life" scenario I led was as pretend-exec of an American company dressing down the management of a hotel it owned for inferior service. These exercises were guaranteed to drive home the day's idiom—"Think on your feet."

Finally, graduation for the Spaniards and a lot of kissing (once on each cheek) for everyone as we exchanged emails addresses, set up a Facebook page and bid fond goodbyes.

This was my fourth program in Spain. I've also participated in identical programs in Italy, Romania and Poland. For information, dates and applications for Spain and beyond, visit www.diverbo.com or, in Eastern Europe, www.angloville.com . Then, get set to have fun!

MARVELOUS MADRID

The program starts and ends in Madrid, so do take a day or two to explore this dynamic city. Diverbo's website suggests well-located, budget-friendly hotels as well as must-see sights. I found my own hotel, the hipster RoomMate, in the gay neighborhood called Chueca. The metro is easy to navigate, and shopping is a joy (think: shoes, shoes, shoes). Check out the street called Calle Leon for indie designer shops and antiques.

Tapas bars abound in every direction: bordering the must-see Plaza Mayor, heart of medieval Spain; along the street called Jesus behind Paseo del Prado, named for the world-famous museum it anchors. And along Calle Huertas, near the Teatro Huertas, Huertqa u Espagnol. Stroll through the modern Mercado San Miguel, just off the Plaza Mayor, with its upscale food stands (oysters with bubbly, anyone?) Talk about people-watching!

More art? After a dizzying spin through the gigantic Prado, head across the street to the gem of a museum nicknamed the Thyssen, whose wealthy founders must have said, "Give one of every bold-name artist." Head onward a few blocks to the Reina Sophia, bastion of contemporary art, including Picasso's famous "Guernica."

Stroll through Retiro, the Central Park of Madrid; catch a bullfight or a flamenco show; or laze away your day over a cup of hot chocolate and churros (doughnut fingers amid the locals at San Gines, in business since 1894.

Rinse and repeat. For more, contact: www.spain.info. ∎

Lavender's Romantic Restaurants Round-Up

BY JOY SUMMERS

Jax Cafe. Photo courtesy of Jax Cafe

The Sample Room. Photo by JP Awad

The Commodore. Photo courtesy of Commonwealth Properties

If in every crackle of a fireplace hearth, in every star that twinkles all too early in the evening, and in the shush-shush sound of walking in winter wear, you're hearing a certain name it's likely you're in love. If you're spending days at a keyboard ignoring a cursor and dream of the curve of a cheek, it's possible you might be sucked right down into the deep romance of the fast-approaching Valentine's season. It's best to stop trying to fight the call of time spent with your love and make some dinner reservations pronto. Below, we've gathered a list of restaurants *Lavender* loves along with tips for getting the most of a night at each of these eateries with intimate corners, and tasty things for feasting together.

THE SAMPLE ROOM

Step inside this gorgeous historic space in Northeast Minneapolis for soft-hewn dark wood that creates a coziness that's even better when there's a dusting of fresh snow outside. The Sample Room feels warm, with amber-tinged lighting that perfectly suits romance. The Sample Room was once The Thies Hotel and Sample Room, which opened in 1893. The building held a few other businesses between now and then, but opened in its current incarnation in the summer of 2002. As the neighborhood around it has changed, The Sample Room has been a steadfast server of locally sourced ingredients built into seasonal comfort food. The intimate setting has made it a popular date night destination for Minneapolis for nearly 18 years.

2124 Marshall St. NE
Minneapolis
612-789-0333
the-sample-room.com

JAX CAFE

Jax Cafe is an icon of Minneapolis dining that is every bit as occasion-worthy as ever. The original cafe opened in 1943. That history is evident in the bar area, my pick for the most romantic seats in the restaurant. Although, the entire place harkens back to the glory days of supper clubs. Best to slide into a seat for a Manhattan or big glass of wine before ordering something opulent. This is not a place for a salad date. Splurge on surf and turf with drawn butter and perfectly seasoned steaks. These dishes are classics for a reason. Slide in with your sweetie and let the expert servers care for your every dining whim.

1928 University Ave. NE
Minneapolis
612-789-7297, ext. 1
jaxcafe.com

THE COMMODORE BAR & RESTAURANT

If F. Scott Fitzgerald was still haunting this neighborhood, he would undoubtedly end up at the gorgeous art deco bar inside The Commodore. This stunning historic bar and party space are located in the base of a Cathedral Hill condo building that for years was something of a legend. The room had been closed, but untouched for years, before the owners decided to re-open the room to the public only a couple of years ago. The space retains all the tails and siren glamor of the post-prohibition era. There are plenty of seats to choose from, the glamorized mirrored walls, the sleek back bar to the white and black tile of the dining room, or casually cozy seating near the front bar. This is the perfect spot for a cocktail and snack, but absolutely mandatory dining if your sweetie is the sort that can quote *All About Eve* off the cuff.

79 Western Ave. N.
St. Paul
651-330-5999
thecommodorebar.com

LOUIS RISTORANTE

It's almost hard to believe that Cossetta's was once a tiny Italian grocery store, located in a St. Paul floodplain. What

stephen vincent design

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Feller. Photo courtesy of Provenance Hotels

the family-run business has become is nothing short of impressive. Downstairs, there's an imported market, with fresh bread. There's a pasticceria with glittering shelves loaded with gorgeous desserts and gelato. There's a deli that's always packed with families, but the crowning jewel is the upstairs, elegant restaurant: Louis. If you and your love are dreaming of a trip to Italy, plan an early evening of wandering through all the shops before ending up for dinner at Louis. Share a classic sausage and peppers or a hearty plate of pasta and don't forget to leave room for dessert. They offer a selection of treats from the downstairs pastry case, built for sharing.

211 7th St. W.
St. Paul
651-222-7378
cossettas.com

FELLER

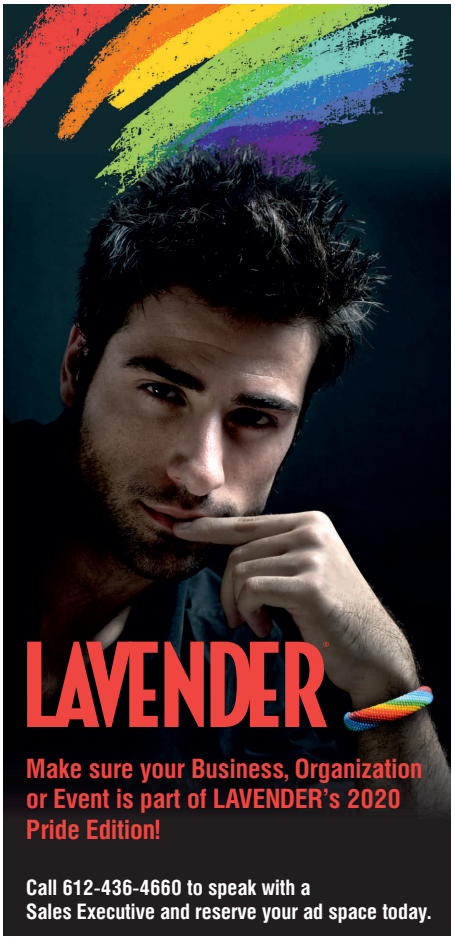
It could be argued that Stillwater is one of the most romantic cities in Minnesota—it's certainly long on charm. Make a day out of a date by wandering through the plentiful shops and antique stores before settling into this beautiful restaurant at the base of the (relatively) new Lora Hotel. Or, book a room upstairs and wander in for the gorgeous brunch served here. The eggs benedict will lily gild a perfect weekend.

402 Main St. S.
Stillwater
651-571-3501
fellerrestaurant.com

J.D. HOYT'S

This historic steakhouse in downtown Minneapolis is another sizzling steakhouse from a different era, although there's a bit more recent of a snazzy '80s vibe. J.D. Hoyt's was named for the founders' two fathers, and the restaurant is a popular stop pre- or post-Twins games in the summer. Known for the Cajun flair on the menu, best to order the pork chops with the signature spice and a Manhattan served up. It's also a rare North Loop location with easy access—there is a handy valet service on site.

301 N. Washington Ave.
Minneapolis
612-338-1560
jdhoyts.com



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Classy Getaways for the Minnesota Romantic

BY KASSIDY TARALA

Whether you're looking to woo your special someone, reignite an old flame, or treat yourself to some quality alone time, these three local hotels will provide a romantic getaway without the expenses of *going away.*

With winter maintaining its firm grasp on Minnesota and Valentine's Day knocking at the door, there's truly no better time to schedule a little staycation at a romantic hotel or resort. Chase the winter blues away and heat up with your S/O at one of these local properties.

HOTEL IVY

Located in downtown Minneapolis, Hotel Ivy offers the best of both worlds: a quaint boutique hotel and the nightlife of Minneapolis' busy streets. The historic Ivy Tower was built in 1930 to house administrative offices, classrooms, and reading rooms for the Second Church of Christ Scientist.

The church sold the building in 1965, and throughout the years it was used for several different purposes. The Ivy Tower was set to be torn down by developers but was saved by the City of Minneapolis in 1986 and deemed historic. It was then incorporated into new construction, opening as Hotel Ivy + Residences in 2008.

"Our boutique hotel offers an elevated and peaceful getaway from the daily grind of the city with a limited 136 guest rooms and nine luxury suites, of which one is our famed bi-level 2,400 sq. ft. Penthouse, the top floors of the Historic Ivy Tower," says Tom Peters, director of sales and marketing.

In addition to being surrounded by endless dining options in downtown Minneapolis, Hotel Ivy is home to its own lobby bar, perfect for small plates and cocktails, and Monello, a formal, full service restaurant offering coastal Italian fare. But perhaps the finest treasure of Hotel Ivy is in the basement.

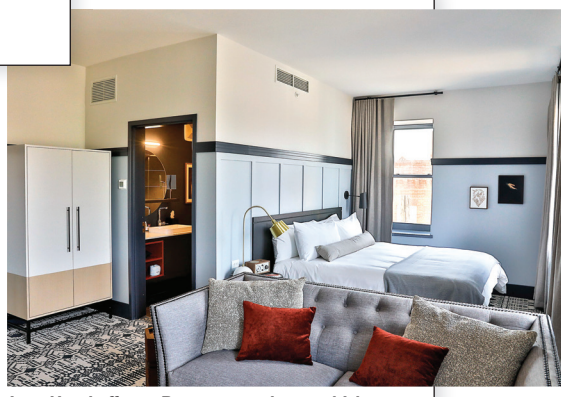
"In our basement, we have a hidden gem, Constantine. It's an intimate bar and lounge with a speakeasy vibe and décor heralding back to the Ivy Tower's religious roots, offering handcrafted cocktails and more traditional bar food, like the Dirty Double and Tater Barrels with cheese dipping sauce, opening at 5pm daily. We also have 24-hour in-room dining available," Peters adds.

Peters says guests can customize their Hotel Ivy experiences with the help of the guest experience manager, who can curate unique experiences ranging from Forest Bathing, where guests are personally guided through the woods and taught how to truly disconnect and immerse themselves in nature, to utilizing the free fleet of Handsome Cycles to bike around the city and explore downtown Minneapolis landmarks.

"For a truly memorable romantic getaway, inquire about staying in our Penthouse, to include a private Butler drawn bath, and a bottle of Laurent Perrier Grand Siecle Champagne with keepsake glasses."

201 S. 11th St.
Minneapolis, MN
612-746-4600
For more information, visit marriott.com.

Want to hot tub in style? Hotel Ivy's got you covered. Photo by Jim Kruger

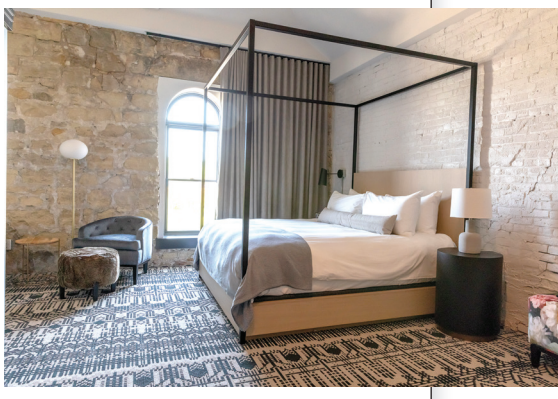


Lora Hotel offers a Romance package, which includes the guests' choice of wine and house made truffles. Photo courtesy of Provenance Hotels

LORA HOTEL

Located in one of Minnesota's most romantic towns, Stillwater, Lora Hotel certainly has it where it counts when it comes to a romantic weekend getaway.

Originally built as a brewery in the 1860s, the building has served as various shops and restaurants before Lora moved in after it was purchased by a group of local investors who partnered with Provenance Hotels of Portland.



Stillwater's Lora Hotel makes for an excellent romantic getaway. Photo courtesy of Provenance Hotels

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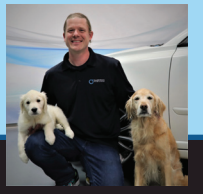
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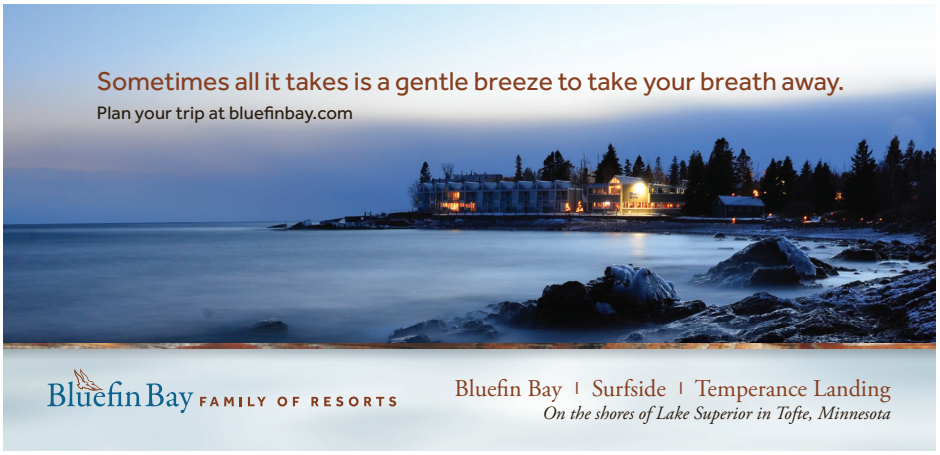

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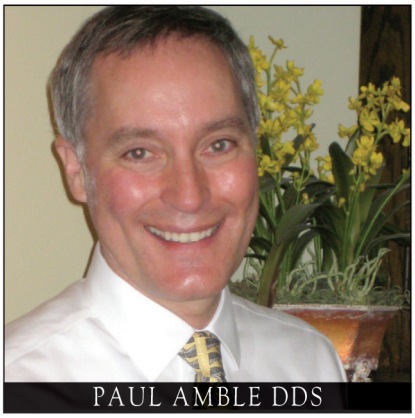
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Bluefin Bay guests have access to a fitness center, sauna, lakewalk, tennis courts, and much more. Photo courtesy of Bluefin Bay Family of Resorts

"Currently, we have a coffee shop (MADE), a restaurant (Feller), and bar (The Long Goodbye) on site. There are several different views of Stillwater from our rooms, some of which have fireplaces or patios/balconies," says Operations Manager Veronica Rosbolt. "We also offer valet parking, in-room dining, in-room Well+Fit (workout) kits, and as a pet-friendly property, we offer free amenities for dogs which include bowls, dog beds, toys, dog tags and treats. Finally, we offer free Shinola bikes for our guests to use in the warmer months."

MADE also offers afternoon teas, and Feller frequently offers wine dinners with prefix menus. The restaurant also has two event spaces, one for more intimate and small events (up to 10 people) and one for larger events (up to 40 seated) such as weddings, retreats, and lectures.

Lora also offers a Romance package, which includes the guests' choice of wine and house made truffles. Plus, the hotel's location is nestled into the bluffs right on Main Street, allowing guests to wander down to the various restaurants and local shops without the pressures and stresses of a big city.

402 Main St. S.
Stillwater, MN
651-571-3500
For more information, visit lorahotel.com.

BLUEFIN BAY RESORT

Bluefin Bay Family of Resorts has won many awards in its early years as Minnesota's Most Romantic Resort, Best Minnesota Resort, and Best Honeymoon Resort for seven years running, making it one of the state's most romantic getaway options. This family of resorts includes Bluefin Bay, Surfside, and Temperance Landing, all on Lake Superior.

Bluefin Bay offers breathtaking views of the lake, in-room fireplaces and whirlpools, meaning there's easily no reason to leave your room all weekend. Resort amenities include pools, fitness areas, and hot tubs, including an outdoor heated pool and hot tub overlooking Lake Superior. Guests also have access to the fitness center, sauna, lakewalk, tennis courts, beach/shoreline, bonfire area with s'mores, Waves of Superior destinations spa, and a host of complimentary guest activities including guided hikes and kayak lessons in the summer, and guided snowshoe hikes and Nordic Skiing in the winter.

Bluefin Bay Resort offers a variety of romance packages, including couple's massages, honeymoon, and mini-moon packages. There are also a variety of outdoor activities (should you ever decide to leave your room), including downhill skiing and snowboarding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and winter hiking, and ice skating. ▮

7192 W. Highway 61
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218-663-7296
For more information, visit bluefinbay.com.

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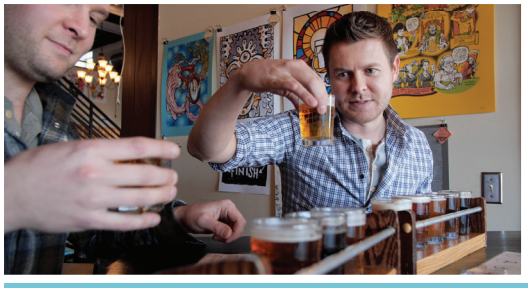
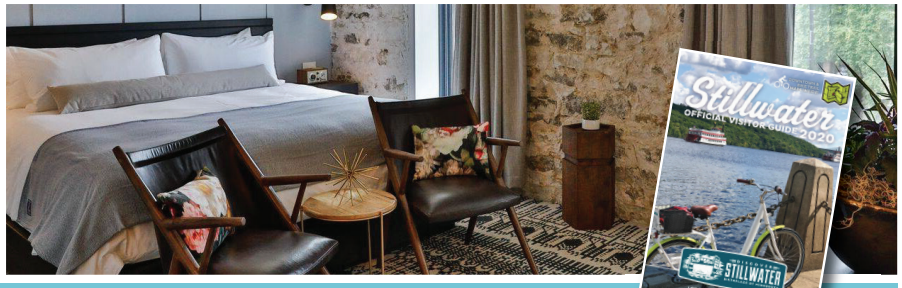

Learn more, visit: DiscoverStillwater.com

BY KASSIDY TARALA

Life, Love & Chocolate

If Forrest Gump was right, and life really is like a box of chocolates, then you definitely won't want to miss out on these three local chocolatiers.

For those who also loudly and proudly proclaim themselves chocoholics, here are three local chocolatiers you will most certainly want to sink your sweet tooth into.

ST. CROIX CHOCOLATE COMPANY

The path Robyn Dochterman followed to owning her own chocolate shop was perhaps less conventional than others. Before Dochterman opened the doors to St. Croix Chocolate Company, she was a journalist for many years in the world of newspapers.

"Back in 2008 during the recession, which hit newspapers very hard, I got laid off and decided I was ready to switch careers and do something in food. Though I had no experience in food, not even as a waitress, I'd been blogging about organic gardening and raising my own chickens and bees with my partner, Deidre Pope. I explored bread-making and artisan cheese, but when I took a professional chocolate class, I was hooked," Dochterman says.

For Dochterman (and many chocolate lovers, I'm sure), chocolate is magic. "You can make truffles so good they practically stop time when people taste them. You can make different flavors come alive and dance on your tongue. You can feature a flavor like local wild grapes you just picked, or you can shine a light on a particular exotic chocolate and make it the star. And you can actually paint with chocolate and make gorgeously colored boxes made of chocolate," she says.

St. Croix Chocolate's maple pecan confectionaries are among some of the shop's signature choices. Photo by Jennifer Simonson

If you swing by St. Croix Chocolate Company, you'll want to make sure you don't have any prior engagements for the next hour (or the rest of the day). With 25 different kinds of truffles, bonbons and caramels, there is truly something for everyone's palate.

"Sea salt caramel is always popular, but all the flavors have their fans, including Key Lime Pie, Passion Fruit, Peanut Butter and Lemon 'Spresso, which is a lemon truffle with chocolate crunchies in it, rolled in espresso sugar. We can't keep that in stock," Dochterman says. "Oh, and I just started making a chocolate that has a layer of butterscotch and a layer of Bailey's Irish Cream. That's going to be a favorite of a lot of people."

Dochterman says they like to get involved in the community outside of the chocolate shop, too. She says that last fall, a couple asked her to make chicken of the woods mushrooms out of chocolates to go on their wedding cake, which was in the shape of a tree stump for their woodsy-themed wedding. The GLBT community is, as it always has been, an important community for Dochterman, too.

"We love being part of the community and were just a major sponsor for OutFront's fundraising gala at Union Depot in St. Paul. We provided more than 2,000 chocolates for dessert," she says. "We can't always contribute at that scale, but even small things, like our 'All Are Welcome Here' sign in our shop window, and being out and being ourselves in our shop, make a difference. And we're always proud to do that."

11 Judd St.
Marine on St. Croix, MN
651-433-1400
www.stcroixchocolateco.com

In addition to crafting immaculate chocolates for customers, Chocolat Celeste also offers chocolate and wine tastings for private parties and corporate events. Photo courtesy of Mary Leonard

CHOCOLAT CELESTE

Mary Leonard followed her love for chocolate and dream of owning her own business after a long career in food and technology. Though Chocolat Celeste wasn't exactly what Leonard initially imagined for herself, it has turned into an award-winning chocolate shop.

"I chose chocolate as the medium for my creativity. Initially I chose to have a web-based business to provide artisan chocolates nationwide. I wanted to create something so much more than a piece of chocolate," she says. "I wanted to create experiences and the experience of opening a box of beauty. Now customers may order online or by visiting the boutique. The chocolates are made onsite of all fresh ingredients."

While many chocolate shops are known for their wacky flavors and creative combinations, Leonard says she likes to stick to the basics by allowing her chocolates to reflect their ingredients in their most natural form.

"I am a purist. I create truffles and bonbons from super premium chocolate from France, Germany, and Switzerland, fresh butter from award-winning Hope Creamery and Pride of Mainstreet Dairy," she says. "Many of the chocolates are adorned with images. The signature line includes images of the cacao plant: the flowers and the pods

that grow from the trunk of the tree, cacao beans, and colors of fermented cacao prior to the roasting (ruby and blue)."

Chocolat Celeste also offers chocolate and wine tastings for private parties and corporate events. "I have a degree in food science and coursework in chocolate technology. The events are fun and educational," she explains.

652 Transfer Rd., Suite 16A
St. Paul, MN
651-644-3823
chocolatceleste.com

PAINTED TURTLE CHOCOLATIER

Having worked for Pillsbury and Cargill and interned with chocolatiers in Paris, Tuscany, Belgium, Vancouver, and other places across the world, Pat Godfrey's calling to chocolate was more than a little obvious.

Now the owner of Painted Turtle Chocolatier, Godfrey spends her time following her passion for chocolate by creating artisan chocolates complete with custom designs.

"We have more than 40 flavors of truffles, which are decadent chocolate ganache with special flavors," she says. "We do numerous special chocolates that use custom molds for customers for special events whether it be an animal, car, Eiffel Tower, etc."

In addition to chocolate, Painted Turtle offers other sweets like caramels, but perhaps what really puts them on the map is their Belgian chocolate.

"What sets us apart is that we use high quality Belgian chocolate, and we do custom designed chocolates that taste as good as they look," Godfrey adds. ∎

229 Central Ave. NE
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www.paintedturtlechocolatier.com

Painted Turtles offers more than 40 flavors of truffles. Photo by Chris Tarbox

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CACTUS MAKES PERFECT

Scott Adam and I are standing in Fractal Cactus, his newly opened plant store, which specializes in cacti, succulents, and air plants. The shop is cozy and practically overflowing with fun things to look at. Statuettes are scattered around the store, air plants hang from the ceilings in planters that make their spindly arms look like jellyfish tentacles, and every succulent you have never heard of is crowded onto the many tables in the small space. There is even a collection of art hung near the front of the store. Fractal Cactus is warm without being stifling. It is full without being overwhelming. It almost feels like its own tiny ecosystem, which is an aesthetic Adam spent years perfecting.

"When I worked at Quality Bicycle Products, there was this artist hallway, and every winter I got it just for my own. It was usually around February and I made a succulent, cactus, air plant jungle. The jungle was a really good respite for people who were cringing at the winter."

I never got the chance to see the 10' x 30' art installation of a jungle that was Adam's specialty, but Fractal Cactus is that idea of a plant-laden respite taken to its most logical extreme. I left Fractal Cactus with an extra bounce in my step. Maybe it was the plants. Maybe it was the carefully curated art collection. Maybe it was Adam. Wherever that bounce came from, Fractal Cactus was at its heart. Rather than the month-long respite he once curated, though, this one is available year-round.

Being a plant store, Fractal Cactus is obviously filled with a lot of natural beauty, but Adam takes it one step further, offering his customers an additional kind of beauty. Local art curator Bryn Larson of OXHEART, heard about Fractal Cactus, "fell in love, and said, 'Let me have two walls.'" The current plan is to have a rotating selection of local art, usually "one artist per wall", but the first installation featured ten paintings all by the same artist. This ongoing relationship with OXHEART also means that Fractal Cactus will host the occasional party whenever a new collection hits its walls.

If your interest in Fractal Cactus only goes as far as the plants, worry not, there are events for you, too. Every Saturday at 2 p.m. through the end of February, Adam will be hosting free classes to learn the basics of taking care of cacti and succulents. "They're pretty informal, pretty quick," Adam says. "You'll get a sense of what the hard rules are and how to figure out where you're at with a particular plant. It's not really about a convenient human schedule. It's about living in the present."

Classes are in held in the back of the store where you will find a table set up with the largest bowl of dirt that I have ever seen (fondly nicknamed "the sandbox") and a stunning array of succulents and cacti that are just waiting to go home with you. Adam's relaxed demeanor and helpful tips will empower you to care for these little treasures – and maybe even yourself. His practical advice is often couched in almost philosophical maxims, emphasizing the arguably symbiotic relationship between people and the plants they care for. "Taking care of plants—especially cacti and succulents—is not just easy, it's probably good for you," Adam says. "It's good to tend to something, to care for it."

Fractal Cactus offers free and paid classes on taking care of succulents and properly maintaining plant life.

Scott Adam is the owner and proprietor of Fractal Cactus, a plant and succulent shop in Southeast Minneapolis.

For those of you who need something a little more complex than a 101 level class, keep your eye out for upcoming offerings. Adam will offer a small roster of paid classes as well, including a class on staghorn fern mounting, which is a particular passion of his. Check out the free intro classes while they are still available and keep an eye out for more.

Since Fractal Cactus is pretty much brand new, your best bet for more information is Instagram (@fractal_cactus) or Facebook (Fractal Cactus MPLS). I would suggest you just mosey straight to the shop, though. From its bite-sized jungle aesthetic to the fun art on the walls to Scott Adam himself, Fractal Cactus might just mitigate your winter blues and turn you into a plant magician.

Fractal Cactus is open Wednesday-Friday from 1-7 p.m. and weekends from 12-6 p.m. Nestled comfortably in Longfellow along the Minnehaha Mile, it is easily accessible for St. Paul and Minneapolis folx alike. Check it out! ▮

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